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ROOM OF THE REGENCY AND LOUIS XV

THE NEW WING THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SECTION

BY ELISABETH LUTHER CARY

THE supplement to the March *Bulletin* of the Metropolitan Museum of Art refers to the magnificent new wing of the Museum which was opened simultaneously with the Whistler Exhibition, as "a most worthy and memorable celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Museum both for the abundance of artistic treasures which are now displayed for the first time to the people of New York, and for the

effectiveness with which they are exhibited."

The treasures themselves, of course, are what the Museum visitor chiefly will enjoy, but it is appropriate briefly to call his attention to the aids provided for his enjoyment by the architect and the committee on arrangement.

When Mr. Morgan purchased the great Hoentschel collection in 1906, the eighteenth century portion of which he gave



LOUIS XIV ROOM

LOOKING NORTH

outright to the Museum while he placed there the Medieval section on indefinite loan, the problem of housing the many examples at once presented itself and became the inspiration of the new wing.

It was founded in a general way on the "Musée des Arts Décoratifs" of the Louvre, but there was a much better chance to obtain excellent lighting and ventilation in galleries to be built expressly for their purpose, and not, as in the case of the French galleries, merely adapted from a building designed for other uses. Consequently, these light, airy, and commodious halls, numbering in all twenty-five and consisting of exhibition rooms on two floors surrounding a large hall sixty-seven feet high, are equipped with every detail that study of the subject could suggest to secure ideal conditions for seeing and enjoying

the objects placed in them, as well as for preserving these in the best possible state for all future time.

The exhibits are arranged as follows: In the central hall is the European sculpture dating from the twelfth to the seventeenth century with some decorative works of the same periods, majolicas, tapestries, etc.; in the side halls are first the Gothic exhibits which occupy two rooms, next the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, third, the French and German Renaissance of the sixteenth century grouped in one room and continuing into the corridor; fourth, a room devoted to the northern baroque of the seventeenth century; then come seven rooms in which are found the French decorative arts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In a room at the head of the stairs are



LOUIS XIV ROOM

LOOKING SOUTH

some objects of the Italian seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; on the lower floor a Swiss room from the Village of Flims belongs to the early seventeenth century, one room is devoted to the arts of the Empire and modern periods; then we proceed to the rooms containing English and American examples from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century and the long transit is completed.

The general plan of arrangement in each room is based on the appropriate mingling of such articles as naturally would be associated at the time to which they belong. Thus, in the Flims room we have the carved wall panels which were removed intact from the original room in the Swiss village; stained-glass windows of the same period, one of the huge tiled stoves in use at that time, with illustrations of Biblical narratives and

moral sayings enforcing their teachings; a carved table and chairs, a pewter mug, some carved boxes, a cradle, and other things that convey in their grouping the sentiment of a living room and not a museum cubbyhole.

In considering the exhibits in detail, although an historical sequence is fairly successfully maintained in their relation to one another, the French art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is represented by so large a number of objects and is so fresh in interest, the majority of the exhibits belonging to that section of the Hoentschel group which is now shown for the first time, that it is pardonable to approach the collections gathered in the new wing from this charming side.

The first of the seven French rooms is devoted to the period of Louis XIV

(1643-1715), and it contains no more notable feature than the beautiful carved doors and overdoors from the royal Château of Marly and the three panels from the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. The later years of the reign of Louis XIV saw this delightful art of woodcarving rise to extraordinary distinction. The pompous and eclectic spirit of Lebrun still swayed the taste of the time, but such adroit and vigorous artists as the architect J. H. Mansard and his followers Boffrand and the two de Cottes stamped the decorations over which they presided with elegance and breadth of style. Private and public buildings alike were ornamented with wood paneling on which rich and dignified designs were wrought with skill of hand and an artistic tact that has not been surpassed.

The overdoors from the Château of Marly are cut in high relief and with a bold massive design that would retain an aspect of importance and decisiveness at the height for which the panels were intended—just below the lofty ceiling of seventeenth century architecture. The lower panels of the door, intended for closer view, are lighter in design and more delicate in workmanship.

The panels that formerly were in the Bibliothèque Royale are not less representative of the period when art and literature alike were taken "au sérieux," and only an occasional innovator such as Molière brought gayety into the popular style. Even Molière's gayety had weight and incisiveness, and in these solidly designed ornaments with their crisp outlines and precise modeling it is easy to note a kind of kinship with the art that was slowly bursting its bonds of convention to ripple in sheer grace and liveliness over the surface of French society.

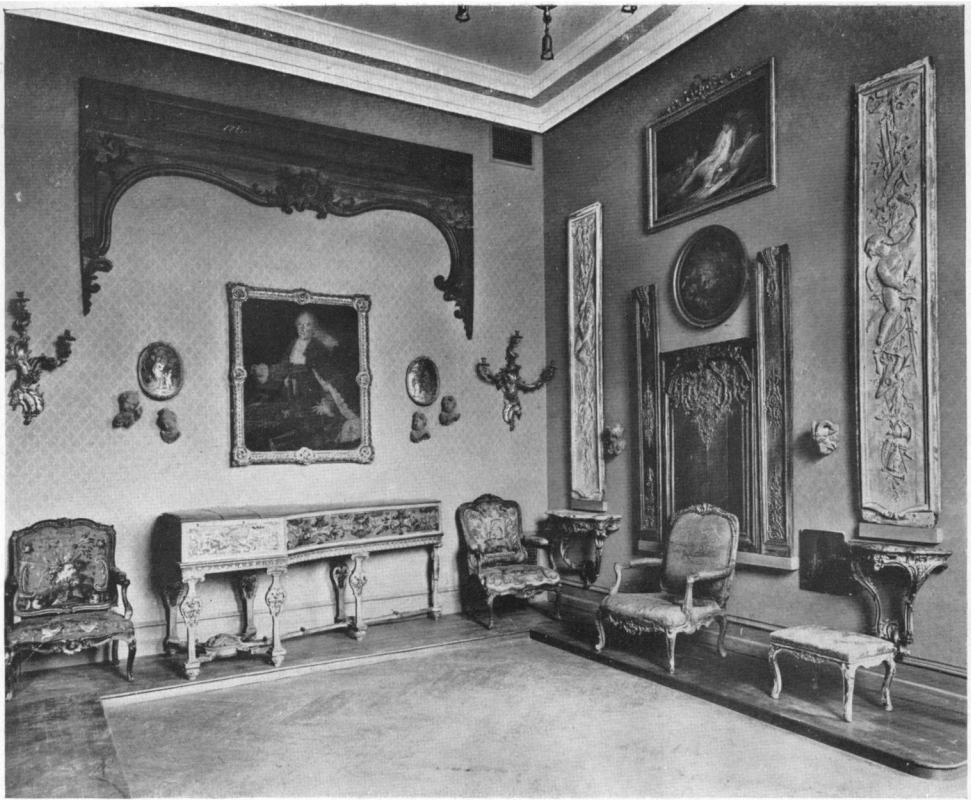
The execution of the pompous decorations of Louis XIV invariably is of a high degree of excellence, and in these pieces chosen by a great modern decorator for touchstones of style and workmanship are well nigh impeccable. Even in these few examples, however, and there is but one of the ornate pieces elaborated by Boulle, or in his tradition,

and none of the swollen bronzes or cold and academic portraits so common to this period, we taste the solemn and mediocre inspiration of the reign.

As soon as we enter upon the period of the Regency we are conscious of a lightening of the atmosphere. The old king dead, France, or to speak more truly, Paris, yielded itself to a reaction for which it had long been prepared. The noblesse shook itself out of its torpor and gaily danced on the brink of the revolution. The relics of this period and of the succeeding reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI are rich in elaborate and refined detail, pretty embellishments, delicate and dainty color. In the long elegant curves of the mirror frames, in the charming sketches for ceiling paintings, blue and yellow and rose and silver, in the quaint designs of tropic birds and beasts of the jungle feasting on hot-house grapes—quaint allegory of the spirit of the age—in the cases of ormolu ornaments, marvels of fancy and taste, the cases of Sèvres as bright and sweet in color as beds of spring blossoms, we feel the steadily growing luxury, the increasing fastidiousness of the period in which taste played the part of conscience and exacted a loyalty as complete as that paid to the sovereign on the already unsteady throne.

As one examines the exquisite craftsmanship and notes the constantly varying designs, the constantly renewed invention, applied to the most imposing and to the most minute objects, one realizes what all this indulgence in superficial pleasure meant to the craftsmen of France, to the enamellers, the chisellers, the gem cutters and wood workers, the china painters and gilders, the weavers and goldsmiths. What industry is back of those perfect joinings and cuttings, what a passion of competency lurks in the incomparable finish of each detail, what a general unity existed in the arts when fragments gathered from a hundred disparate sources are eloquent of the same lightness and gayety of sentiment.

It must of course be remembered that, while this is by no means a collection



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representative of all the forms of art characterising the eighteenth century, each piece has been chosen for its worth as a model of style and execution and chosen by a collector knowing all the secrets of the trades.

M. Hoentschel was one of those French enthusiasts who make of their profession, whatever it may be, a species of religion, and his learning was so thorough and of so wide a scope that almost any fragment of a pure style would serve him as inspiration for a complete scheme of decoration in that style. Like Cuvier he could reconstruct the whole skeleton from a single bone. Consequently we are judging the period by its best in judging it by such a collection. It is, however, obvious that for such a best to be possible the average must have been very high and the preparation thorough, and

we fall easily into the error of thinking of this patronage of the arts as an unqualified national benefit, forgetting that while art and the manufactures thrived, the farms of the fertile country languished, and the nourishment of the rural districts was neglected for the over-feeding of glutton Paris.

It is not easy, certainly, to remember the vices and shadows cast over the nation while we are enjoying this ghostly beauty left to us. The rooms devoted to the period of Louis XVI's reign are particularly joyous. The employment of paintings set into panels, over the doors, by the side of mantels, over the arches of windows and wherever a suitable place could be found for them, had become by this time very general and the enlivening effect upon the rooms is marked. The decorators of the preceding reign

had taken up with delight the practice of giving their "fêtes galantes" and pastorales a Chinese or Turkish setting in which exotic birds flew gaily about, monkeys climbed to the tops of trees, cherubs in Turkish costume or little mandarins in flapping trousers strolled among the verdure, and pretty sultanas playfully besieged their Pashas. Several of these panels are in the Hoentschel collection, the prettiest coming, according to a slightly vague assumption, from a "Boudoir Turque" at Versailles, the lively colors reflecting the general lively tone of the surroundings, which we may safely imagine to have been a cheerful harmony of pale greens, mauves, violets, blues, and yellows, no one color strongly predominating.

One of the later vogues is that of grisailles imitating sculpture in bronze, marble or terra cotta, and these also are amply represented by little panels in which children at play symbolize the seasons, and medallions with classic figures illustrate sentiments of friendship and honor.

This meretricious trick of imitating one substance in the use of another is out of harmony with the sincere workmanship of the eighteenth century, but the tact of the designers enabled them to

bring even this atrocity into a general scheme of graceful beauty.

The real secret of the incorruptible harmony of so many sharply accented and various details lies in the fact that it was still the habit of the architect to plan and direct the decoration of the interiors the framework of which he had designed.

The French prints of the eighteenth century show clearly how even in the simpler houses and rooms the architecture and the decoration play into one delightful effect, the furniture after models by Riesener or Raentgen, ardent little cupids and satyrs modeled by Clodion, medallions with faint-flushed dreams of nymphs and loves after the manner of Fragonard, bronzes delicately chiseled and gilt under the influence of Gouthiere's exacting standard, the quaintness of the chinoiseries, the brightness of silks and tapestries, the flexible formality of gilded wreaths and streamers of carved and gilded flowers—how truly the external aspect of that brilliant society is reflected in the sum of these items, and how little they reveal of the approaching "Terror"! There is no way of approaching French history so inviting and so rewarding as through the study of the decorative arts.

"LA GUILANDE": A DECORATION

BY HENRY B. CULVER

THE custom of making offerings for escape from shipwreck and drowning is of immemorial antiquity. Among those that obtained in ancient Rome was the custom of hanging up in the Temple of Neptune the dripping and sea-stained garments of mariners escaped from drowning as a votive offering to the bounteous God of the Sea.

In many of the countries bordering upon the Baltic Sea it has been a custom, centuries old, for mariners and fishermen to make models of ships and to offer them at various shrines as a token

of thanksgiving for escape from the perils of the sea. These model ships usually hang suspended from the ceilings of the cathedrals, churches, and chapels in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Particularly the church upon the little Island of Heligoland in the North Sea is filled with them. The effect of these miniature vessels, hanging from the arches of churches and chapels, is most artistic and has suggested this item of interior decoration for secular purposes.

Such an idea prompted the writer to construct, at leisure moments, the